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SUBJECT: FICO TO EU: WE'LL RATIFY LISBON TREATY

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Classified By: DCM Lawrence R. Silverman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Prime Minister Fico met with EU ambassadors on January 30 to calm their fears about Lisbon Treaty ratification hours after the PM postponed the ratification vote in parliament due to opposition demands that Fico withdraw his controversial new press law draft as a precondition for its support (see reftel). Fico said he would continue seeking a quorum for a vote on a daily basis but would not bring the treaty to a vote until he knew it would be approved. He also urged EU ambassadors to use their channels to press the opposition. Fico added that his press law would go forward to parliament as drafted, but that his government was open to arguments against the draft made by the OSCE, Council of Europe, etc. From the opposition, MP (and ex-Foreign Minister) Eduard Kukan (SDKU) opined that the treaty would probably be ratified at the next parliamentary session, beginning March 26.

12. (C) In their meeting, European ambassadors told Fico that their primary concern in this affair was to avoid an actual vote against ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in Slovakia, which (even though temporary) could inspire Lisbon opponents elsewhere in Europe. While some European embassies (UK, Netherlands, Denmark) have earlier expressed reservations to the GOS about the press law, the issue was not seriously discussed in the meeting. The EU Ambassadors raised the press law with FM Kubis on January 31, and Kubis reiterated that the GOS would take foreign comments on problems with the draft into account.

13. (C) After the Fico meeting, both the Irish and Italian DCMs commented to Poloff that they believed the opposition's decision to link the press law with the Lisbon Treaty was irresponsible. In the Irish DCM's words, "No one is coming out of this looking good." The Czech Ambassador described the situation as "two children fighting." Given apparently limited support from their usual EU allies, opposition leaders Dzurinda (SDKU) and Csaky (SMK) will have a more difficult time leveraging the government to make changes to the press law -- though they still have a strong possibility to force concessions from Fico. To improve his soft position, Dzurinda has invited the EU ambassadors to meet with him to enlist their support in making changes to the press law so that Lisbon ratification can move forward.  
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